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ABSTRACT

The conventional psycholinguistic views of a strictly cognitive nature are reductive with respect to the complexity of the learning process. In language learning, motivation is viewed variously: (1) as a co-essential and equally powerful factor with linguistic aptitude and personality traits; (2) as arising from interaction between organism and environment; (3) as either inchoactive or derivational in nature; and (4) as either intrinsic or extrinsic. Other differences in motivation are contextual. Attitude is a context-generated motivational factor. Motivation and attitudes in second language learning have been examined from a psycholinguistic perspective, including the relationship of language attitude and aptitude, social psychological factors, and interlinguistic situations of diglossia and/or bilingualism. Empirical data point to the socio-genetic character of attitude in second language learning and to the importance of psychoeducational strategies aimed at developing appropriate attitudes toward the foreign language to be studied. Attitudes toward a language as the object of study are not inborn, but derive from social factors, mediated by states of the interacting organism, which together condition dispositional sets of a cognitive-affective nature toward given cultures and their information transmission systems. Therefore, developing sound attitudes is the first step toward achievement of bilingualism. (MSE)

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A PSYCHO-SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE IN FL LEARNING: THE ROLE OF ATTITUDE AS A DYNAMIC FACTOR

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The title of my paper is a clear indication of a counter-active stance with regard to current epistemological views related to the psychology of second language learning. I believe that old psycholinguistic views of a strictly cognitive nature are reductive with respect to the complexity of the learning process. For this reason I underline the added component "socio" in labelling my view. Within a 'holistic' view of language learning I will consider one oft-neglected factor, viz. attitude, as a basic component of motivation.

I will then propose as a premise the main lines of my holistic view, and secondly I will present a few theoretical considerations followed by research data in which the learning of a Second Language in diglossic /bilingual situations is involved.

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1. The role of attitude and motivation in L2 learning

The central role of motivation as a triggering factor in all learning processes has been frequently and adequately evidenced by psychological theory and research. Language learning, as a vital developmental process in human beings, rests very largely on the influence of cognitive and dynamic factors. Motivational factors have been studied as underlying achievement in learning one or more languages. Attitude appears to be strictly tied up with motivational dynamics, and to work most powerfully especially in acquiring mastery in a second language. It tends to influence most decisively the assimilation, in a profound personological and behavioral sense, of both language patterns and cultural modalities.

A short premise is in order on the operational concepts of motivation and attitude vis à-vis second language learning.

1.1 Motivation with respect to learning in general and language learning in particular is to be viewed under a variety of aspects:

(a) Motivation appears to be a co-essential and equipowerful factor together with linguistic aptitude and personality traits. Success in language learning

is found to depend to a fairly equal degree on both linguistic aptitude and on motivation, or interest, attitude, value-perception; the latter usually connected with personality traits, like extroversion/intraversion. Attitude seems to be central in motivational dynamics.

(b) Motivation, and more particularly attitude, rises from relational interaction between organism and environment, or, more precisely, in the human being, between the Self and the World. According to Titone's 'mathetic cycle', proposed as a general model of learning, motivation is a dynamogenetic process consisting of the following essential steps: 1. Need perception 2. Feeling of interest 3. Positive attitude 4. Intention as an approaching mechanism of a conscious nature 5. Decision, or voluntary choice. The initial step—need perception—stems from a comparison between the state of the organism and the environmental supplies capable of filling organic and psychological demands. Interest in turn arises out of the perception of an object appropriate to the organism's or the person's need. Attitude follows as a specifically human response to the environment as carrier of values. It develops as a specific cognitive-affective set. In our case linguistic attitude would be a cognitive-affective orientation towards one particular language and culture. And it can work as a control mechanism (feedback) as well as a

propelling force pushing towards new worthy goals (feed forward).

(c) Motivation can be of an inchoative character (primary motivation) when it initiates behavior or learning, or of an emergent or derivational nature (secondary motivation) when it ar es from action or the learning process itself. Attitude, consequently, can be modified in the course of learning whatever it may be at the origin of the same process. Of course, inchoative motivation, to be effective, must have a lasting or durable influence on learning: it must be continuous with learning, even though it may be virtually present only.

(d) Motivation can be intrinsic (endogenous) when it is functional to the growth of the organism and arises from inborn or internalized needs and interests (see the notion of interest according to the Functional School of psychology, J. Dewey and E. Claparède); or it can be extrinsic (exogenous) when it is induced from outside conditions like cultural values, social pressures, disciplinary measures or laws and regulations, etc. Intra-group relations, as illustrated e.g. by K. Lewin, may be at the root of certain types of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Attitude typically belongs in the sphere of intrinsic motivation since it is generated from within the psychological organism.

1.2 Other differences in the kind of motivation are of a contextual (social-cultural) origin. This applies particularly to language learning. Attitude is a context-generated motivational factor, although its structure in itself is of an endogenous nature: in other words, it is the result of internalization as a process directed to assimilate values offered by society and history. In the specific case of language it is possible to hypothesize two classes of contextually different attitudes:

(a) linguistic attitude toward a second language/culture as co-existent in a given bilingual area: this happens in bilingual regions or communities even though not all the individuals are in themselves bilingual (societal bilingualism);

(b) linguistic attitude toward school-context learning of a second/foreign language: the second language may not be present in the community but it is contacted at school as a curriculum subject. The present discussion aims at focusing this second type of context only.

1.3 - Motivation and attitude in L2 learning have been examined in a psycholinguistic perspective (see Lambert; 1972; CMLR; 1976; Spoelders, 1978; Oller, 1981). A very brief summary may be recalled here.

3.1 - Research conducted by W.E. Lambert, H. Gardner, and others in Canada, have evidenced the character of equal strength in effective language learning of two sets of factors: attitude factors (as a subjective disposition toward learning objects) and aptitude factors (or individual capacity for learning brought to a sufficient degree of 'readiness'). Moreover, particular importance must be assigned to what Lambert has called "integrative motivation" which implies the tendency or desire to become like a valued member of the foreign community by mastering its language. As said above, attitude is strictly tied up with motivation inasmuch as it triggers interest, intention, and decision to operate toward learning. Motivation is a sine qua non factor in all human learning, and therefore, above all, in language learning, especially as a conscious process of acquisition distinct from spontaneous language development in the child.

1.3.2 - Motivation and attitude hold an extremely important role in all situations which are not natural but culturally or socially induced like school education. Learning in that case requires more conscious effort and continuity which need the support of interest and attitude. Secondly, motivation and attitude are crucial in the case of language education of the children of migrant workers. Studies conducted with

samples of immigrants have emphasized the necessity of adequate intrinsic motivation for the maintenance of L1 with immigrant children, while on the other side positive attitude is generally strongly in favor of L2, or the language of the host country. (See Tedesco, 1980; Oesch-Serra et al., 1981).

2. Attitudes in second language learning: research trends

In addition to language aptitude, social psychological factors have long been a concern among researchers on classroom second-language learning. In the 1960s and 1970s, Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert (Gardner and Lambert, 1972), using both children and adults as subjects, identified a cluster of attitudinal and motivational factors that predicted degree of achievement reached in second-language learning. This cluster was independent of the cluster of factors measuring aptitude in second languages, but correlated equally well with achievement. Furthermore, Gardner (1981) has found that persistence in second-language learning (wanting to take more courses) and involvement in classroom activities were correlated with attitudinal and motivational variables.

Lambert (1981) has argued that attitudinal and motivational factors are even more important than language-learning aptitude; the attitude of learners toward the cultural group that speaks the second language and their desire to participate in this group can compensate, he maintained, for a lack of natural aptitude in second-language learning. In general, the tendency of recent research has been to de-emphasize native language-learning abilities and to emphasize the role of social and cultural factors.

Cummins (1981b), for example, has proposed that individual and group differences in educational achievement by minority-language children can be accounted for by sociocultural variables that interact with educational treatments. According to Cummins, one of the reasons why individuals or groups perform poorly in a school situation where they have to use a second language is ambivalence or negative feelings toward the majority culture and often toward their own culture. In contrast, individuals or groups who do well academically do not suffer from this "bicultural ambivalence."

Perhaps bicultural ambivalence becomes more pronounced the older the child. If this is the case, it may help to account for why individual and social variables have been central to the agenda of researchers

concerned with classroom second-language learning. Although motivational factors affect second-language learning in natural, untutored situations (see Wong Fillmore, 1976), such factors seem to have an even greater role in older children for whom issues of individual identity and group membership are more acute.

There has been a great deal of research - especially by Canadian investigators - on the relationship between language learning and attitudinal factors. In particular, Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert (1972) found that those subjects who had an "integrative" motivation - who learned the language in order to become like members of the target language group - were more successful learners than those who had an "instrumental" motivation - learning the language for practical reasons, such as passing an examination or getting a job. Further research has indicated, however, that the relationship between integrative and instrumental motivation and second-language learning is more complex than was originally thought; some research has even indicated that there are conditions under which instrumental motivation leads to more successful second-language learning than does integrative motivation (Izzo, 1981).

John Schumann (1976) argued that better second-language learning will occur when learners perceive

little "social distance" between themselves and the target language group. According to Schumann, this occurs when both groups desire assimilation and when the cultures of both groups are congruent. Social distance is thought to increase when there is less willingness to assimilate and when there is cultural conflict. A similar model was proposed by Meisel (1980), who argued that learners vary along a socio-psychological continuum that ranges from a segregative to an integrative orientation, depending on how favorably they are disposed toward speakers of the target language. In Meisel's system, socio-psychological orientation relates to the types of strategies used by the learners in acquiring the target language.

Most of the research on attitudes and motivation has been conducted with adolescents and adults, and Genesee and Hamayan (1980) questioned whether such variables are relevant for young second-language learners in view of children's poorly developed social identity and understanding of other social groups. Nonetheless, as these authors pointed out, some sort of integrative motivation may operate in young children. They cited in this context Wong Fillmore's (1976) finding that among child second-language learners acquiring the language in a natural setting, best results were obtained by those children who showed the

greatest desire to belong to and identify with target language speakers.

One possibility is that the direction of causality, rather than going from integrative motivation to successful second-language learning, goes in the opposite direction. That is, because they are successful second-language learners, children may become more positively disposed toward the target language group (Figure 8.1). Hermann (1980) tested this hypothesis with a sample of 750 German children learning English as a foreign language. One group had five years of English, and the others were beginners. She found that the group with more experience with the language showed significantly more positive attitudes toward the target culture than did the beginners. Furthermore, although there was no consistent pattern of integrative orientation toward the target group among the high proficiency learners, the lower proficiency group showed significantly more prejudice. Strong (in press) found that those children already relatively fluent in English showed a significantly greater desire to associate with members of the target language group than did less fluent second-language speakers.

The attitudes of peers can play an important role in determining the attitudes and motivation of child second-language learners. There has not been a great

deal of research on this topic, although children in the St. Lambert early immersion program were found to have more positive attitudes toward French people than control children in the early grades. However, by the third grade these differences had disappeared. Lambert and Tucker (1972) attributed this development to a number of causes, one of which was a desire on the part of the experimental children to be "normal" - that is, not overly French. This may be one reason why some children retain an accent in a second language.

3. Attitudes regarding interlinguistic situations of diglossia and/or bilingualism

Case studies of psycho-socio-linguistic situations concerning the co-existence or conflict of two codes in the same area or in the school have been conducted by R. Titone's team (Chair: Applied Psycholinguistics, University of Rome) taking account of four possible situations; these arise from the convergence of (A) a dialect vs. the national language, (B) a minority language vs. the national language, (C) a dialect vs. the national language and vs. a foreign language, and (D) Italian as a foreign language in an alien community.

(A) Dialect vs. National Language (Italian).

Since 1974 over twenty investigations have been conducted aiming at checking on not only communication difficulties and handicaps in school interaction due to conflicts between use of dialect and instruction in the national language (Italian) but also particular attitudes vis-à-vis the local dialect on one side and the national standard language on the other of diglossic individuals whether during childhood or adulthood. Typical results are shown in two projects developed in two regions of Central and Southern Italy.

Tudini (1978) has examined language behavioral patterns dependent on cultural transformation in a mountain village of Abruzzo (Pescasseroli). The objective was not only that of determining the extent of use of both the local dialect and the national language but especially the users' attitudes with regard to both codes. Testing instruments were: a simplified questionnaire administered to four groups of adult workers; an enlarged questionnaire given to secondary school students, teachers, and retired adults; the semantic differential applied to this second group; observations and interviews with elementary school pupils; and a diachronic linguistic examination of the evolution of the local dialect.

Results. To 90.90% of the Ss the dialect preserves a clear connotation of familiarity and intimacy; but

the national language is considered very higly and preferred unreservedly from the point of view of social prestige and for wider contacts. The dialect is gradually being segregated into a cultural ghetto consisting mainly of very old people or semi-illiterates.

Iuzzino (1979-1980), on the other hand, has specifically explored school contexts. She examined 80 elementary school children, male and female, in 3rd and 5th grades, their teachers, and their parents. Her aim was to explore: the socio-affective perception those speakers have of the two linguistic codes; dialect interferences with regard to the standard language; the relationship between choice of code and expressive efficacy in communicating information contents; the relationship between use of dialect and learning achievement in school subjects.

Results. A very high percentage (above 50%) both of the children and their parents, but especially of their teachers, manifest most clearly an over-rating attitude with regard to the prestige of the national standard language in comparison with the dialect, even though the Ss'use of the standard language is deficient or not very frequent. This favorable attitude toward the standard language is only one factor fostering learning. Occasional failure is due to pedagogical inefficiency or the influence of lower-class home

environment.

(B) Minority Language vs. National Language (Italian).

Chiarelli (1978) wanted to explore the attitudes of members of a bilingual Italian-Albanian community in a Southern Italian village (San Nicola dell'Alto) towards respectively Albanian and Italian. Instruments used were two structured questionnaires applied orally by means of individual interviews with two samples of Ss: adult workers (up to the age of 70) and students and teachers.

Results. Standard Italian is seen as a necessary schooling tool and essential component of literacy; and furthermore as a bridge towards wider social contacts. Albanian is connoted by a strong affective orientation of historical and cultural belongingness. Out of 101 adults interviewed 45% think that the Italian language is necessary for school success, whereas 42% deny it. It is indifferent, from the standpoint of social prestige, whether a person speaks one or the other language (according to 68%). Answers are not substantially different with the subgroups (10 male students, 10 female students, and 10 elementary school teachers). These groups are convinced that young children must be initiated as effectively as possible to a good command of the standard Italian language (70% of the male

students, 90% of the female students, and 80% of the teachers). Among adults and old people of the village the Albanian language is dominant; and they believe firmly that Albanian must be preserved at all as a cultural heritage (38%) or linguistic heritage (33%). But also young people are convinced (100%) about the utility, vitality, and necessity of maintenance of Albanian. However their undoubtful swinging between two languages and cultures has thrown them into a generalized identity crisis and a widespread state of anomie.

(C) Dialect vs. National Language vs. Foreign Language.

Two studies can be cited here. The first conducted by one of my students, Tedesco (1980), was carried out in the Swiss Canton of Zurich on the educational achievement and cultural-linguistic attitudes of 239 Italian students (125 from 5th and 6th grades, 114 from the middle school). They were children of Italian immigrants working in Switzerland. Interviews revealed a sad situation with regard to school failure. As far as cultural identity and linguistic attitudes are concerned, anomie is a clear data. More than statistical data, which however are revealing with respect to individual differences of feeling and opinion, certain answers to crucial questions are reasons for worry. For example, the question, "Do you feel you are Italian

or Swiss?", the answers are contradictory: "Very much Italian", "Italian 100 per cent!", but at the same time: "More Italian but also a little Swiss", "Italian, even though I have Swiss friends". Not infrequently do they show unambiguous signs of Swiss identity: they have no Italian friends, and they don't want to go back to Italy. Now the point is that these feelings and attitudes of uncertainty and anomie impoverish the social sources of motivation for the study of Italian, and make it difficult to start an effective process of learning of the original language which actually is not used in the home since the village dialect is usually made use of in communicating with their parents.

A second study, by Oesch-Serra et al. (1981), confirms the above results. It was conducted by Swiss researchers in the Canton of Neuchatel. It is of interest to find what emerges from exploring the younger generation's attitudes, since the younger people are totally integrated with the host culture and language. It should be made clear that the so-called native language (Italian) has become a second language and needs to be studied as a foreign language. Now with regard to the attitude concerning the immigrants' native language and culture (both the dialect and the standard national language), two stages have been observed related to and dependent on the psycho-social development

of the younger generation: the first stage is characterized by a neat refusal of the first language felt as deviant from the life norms of the majority group (host community) to which the young individual wants absolutely to adhere; on a later stage young people, during or at the end of their teens, rediscover their native language and its cultural heritage all the way even as far as idealizing a mythical "fatherland", the goal of an old age retirement. This observation, made in Europe, can be repeated also in other countries like the USA and Canada.

Obviously, this ambivalence of attitudes impinges on learning, re-learning, or maintaining the original language, which has become or is becoming foreign to the young immigrant.

(D) Attitude and appreciation of certain traits of a foreign language.

Apotheloz and Bysaeth (1981) carried out a very interesting study of linguistic attitudes regarding some foreign languages being studied by Swiss students. By employing two types of questionnaire (a matching test and the semantic differential) they wanted to ascertain various traits of individual attitude vis-à-vis different languages: English, French, Spanish, Swiss-German, Italian, German. The evaluation of the traits of each language was to take place on the basis

of thirteen adjectives classified into three categories: esthetic-affective, utilitarian, learning-comprehension. The esthetic-affective category seems to be rather prominent and influencing choice or learning effort. The results usually combine Italian and Spanish. In particular, these two languages are opposed to the others - and specifically to Swiss-German and German, less to French and English-because of their position on the scale of esthetic values (the adjectives which received high grades are musical, warm, beautiful, coquettish, and less used the adjective sweet). On the other side, Italian and Spanish differ as to the attributes related to "learning" and "understanding" inasmuch as Italian is as a whole considered to be simpler. They differ also from the point of view of "utility" although very slightly. (Spanish is considered to be more useful). Moreover, Italian and Spanish receive middle-low grades as to their practical value and importance. Finally, attitude appears to have a different connotation according to sex: thus English, Italian, and Spanish arose more positive responses among female students than among male ones, with regard to all attributes, while Swiss-German received very negative responses. Divergence between the responses of boys and girls concerns especially Italian and Spanish.

Such evaluative responses, no matter how shallow they may appear, should not be considered irrelevant: they too weigh very heavily, particularly in certain social contexts, on motivations concerning study or choice of a foreign/second language. What K. Bühler called the characteristic of "appeal" as part of the essential features of language as an esthetic product, works as a factor in the relationship between personality and language behavior. Theoretically, R. Titone's Holodynamic Model (1973, 1981) which emphasizes the role of the Self as individual/social pole interacting with the World, finds a confirmation from these empirical facts.

4. Socio-cultural genesis of attitudes in L2 learning

A brief remark by way of conclusion is in order at this point. Empirical data point to the socio-genetic character of attitude in second language learning and to the importance of psycho-educational strategies aiming at developing appropriate attitudes vis-à-vis the second/foreign language to be studied.

Positive or negative attitudes towards a language as object of study are not inborn: they derive from social factors, mediated by states of the interacting

organism, which together condition dispositional sets of a cognitive-affective nature toward given cultures and their transmission systems. Hence the origin of preferences or bias, oftentimes transformed into cultural clichés. It is of utmost importance, where ethnolinguistic conflicts are to be settled or where effective learning of a second language is to be fostered, to supply conditions favoring the development of attitudes of acceptance of cultural patterns diverging from native ones. This can be obtained through special initiatives aiming at acquaintance and self-identification with the target culture. To this purpose it has been noted that efficient organization of international student exchange programs has brought in general good results relatively to the promotion of favorable linguistic attitudes. Cziko and Lambert (1976) report about a well controlled experiment carried out in Canada consisting in the mutual immersion of students from French-speaking and English-speaking schools into areas speaking the opposite language. Results have been optimal with regard to the changing or developing of positive linguistic-cultural attitudes in both groups. The consequence was a deeper absorption of the two languages on either side.

It can therefore be reconfirmed that developing sound attitudes is the first step towards the achievement of bilingualism.

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